"Nobody will find it," I replied. "And what would you write?"

"That we were here, that we were perfectly happy and that we left this place confident we would find our way home."

I signed this note with him. Here, in the wilderness, we indeed felt perfectly happy although we were not sure what awaited us. I still had a long road ahead. Mikhail's life was to end earlier—in one of Stalin's dungeons.

We started the next day with a substantial breakfast—more hot turkey stew, more roast turkey, hot cocoa, biscuit crumbs.

Mikhail picked out a tree sixteen or eighteen inches thick for the raft, and we cut it into two logs fifteen feet long. The tree seemed dry enough, but when we tried to drag the logs to the river we found them unusually heavy. We realized how much strength we had lost. We rolled the logs to the water and floated them downstream to the campsite. Then we added two smaller logs to the thick ones to keep them apart and adjusted the crossbars. We found it hard to tighten the ropes, but otherwise the work went well. Before sunset, when the raft was ready and I was resting on hot pebbles, with the back of my head in the cold water, Mikhail went into the thicket and returned with a couple of partridges. We went to sleep with full stomachs, even more confident and happy than we had been the night before.

In the morning we packed and loaded our luggage and pushed the raft into the current. It slipped to the middle of the river and slowly went to the bottom. The logs were green, and, after having absorbed more water during the night, they would not float. We salvaged the luggage and brought it to the shore, leaving the raft in the river.

I lay on warm pebbles looking at the skyline above the far shore of the river. If only we knew where we were! Suddenly I noticed a brown-gray spot above the waving line of the green. I examined it through the field glasses. It was a rocky peak, a lofty point on the right, and a terrace below it on the left. I got out my map. Kiwagi! Only I was seeing it now from the side opposite the one I had sketched from the trail. I looked at the compass. The peak was some fifteen degrees right of north. I called to Mikhail, "That is Kiwagi! If we go straight north we shall pass at its foot and hit the trail three days' march from Nelkan."

We left our tent and, taking only the most essential equipment, crossed the river, and went into the virgin taiga by compass. Our further journey took us across gently rolling land with evergreen forests, with a stream or spring in every hollow, and provided us with plenty of dry wood for campfires on the slopes. The best hunting was along the streams early in the morning. Mikhail did not miss a single shot. After three days' march we hit the Nelkan-Ayan trail. Three